The Impacts of Service Engagement through the Eyes of Saint Louis University Students

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Background
Saint Louis University

Mission: The pursuit of truth for the greater glory of God and for the service of humanity.

- Saint Louis University founded in 1818 is located in the heart of midtown St. Louis
- The student population is predominately White (71 percent) and from upper middle class backgrounds
- The average parental income (excluding international students) in 2011 was $134,075
- Service engagement is a cultural norm
- This year at Make a Difference Day there were 3,376 participants
SLU Bubble

Saint Louis University Campus

North Grand Boulevard and Cottage Avenue (1.2 miles and 4 minutes from campus)
Research Questions

Research Objective: The goal of this project was to go beyond accounting for student participation in service by uncovering the motivations for service, learning from service experiences and ultimately the impact of service on students' lives.

1. Did particular community service opportunities inspire transformation of the student?

2. What did students learn from their service experiences?

3. How has involvement in community service influenced student life decisions such as changes in major? Choice of career?
Data and Methods
Data and Methods

- The Office of Institutional Research (OIR) and the Center for Service and Community Engagement (CSCE) formed a research team.

- Phenomenological three part interviewing method.

- Using a criterion sampling method we recruited 20 juniors and seniors from 151 actively engaged students in service who responded to a screening survey administered to 3,354 students.
Data and Methods (cont..)

- Created interview protocol
- Transcribed interviews
- Created codebook as a research team
- Coded as a research team
Data and Methods (cont..)

- Conducted a basic themes analysis of service motivations, service learning, and service impacts prior to SLU and at SLU

- Created service profiles of respondents through a cross case analysis

- Validity Check of Data, Johnson (1997)
  Investigator Triangulation
  Participant Feedback
# Sample Characteristics

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<th>Respondents</th>
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Results
Service Profiles

- 60% Service Transformers
- 30% Service Learners
- 10% Service Doers
Service Doers

Characteristics of the service doer type:

- Service is seen as fun
- Through service there are opportunities to build your social network
- Service hours are required for participation in a club
- Participation in multiple episodic types of service more typical than engagement in ongoing activities
- Some awareness of the people they serve
- Do not exhibit changed worldviews about society and structural inequalities as a result of their service experiences
Service Learners

Characteristics of the service learner type:

- Realize there are structural inequalities and may want to work to change these inequalities
- Engaged in ongoing service and/or participated in a service immersion experience
- They may be undecided on whether they want to change academic/career plans
- Awareness of the people they serve
- They see how they can apply their service experiences to how they will interact with future clients, patients, or customers
- They have clarified but not changed their career goals to reflect their service experiences
- Many are highly committed
Service Transformers

Characteristics of the service transformer type:

- Uncomfortable with structural inequalities and want to help change them
- Engaged in ongoing service and/or participated in a service immersion experience
- Awareness of the people they serve
- Many are uncomfortable with the term service and characterizing those served as somehow less than or disadvantaged
- Highly committed
Service Motivations

- Top motivating factors for service prior to SLU
  Family/upbringing
  Faith/religion
  Service requirement

- Top motivating factors for service at SLU
  Service requirement
  Making friends
  Religion/faith
  Social responsibility
Service Learning

- Top service learning indicators prior to SLU
  Awareness of others
  Changed worldview
  Social issues

- Top service learning indicators at SLU
  Awareness of others
  Social issues (educational disparities, economic privilege, homelessness, rights of persons with disabilities, family structure, and job discrimination)
Service Impacts

- Overall, there were small impacts of service prior to SLU
- Top service impacts prior to SLU
  - Enjoyment
  - Personal growth
  - Built relationships
- Top service impacts at SLU
  - Built relationships
  - Enjoyment
  - Personal growth
Conclusions
Research Findings

Question 1: Did particular community service opportunities inspire transformation of the student?

- Service doers were not largely transformed by their service experiences. They were involved in service opportunities where they did not form meaningful connections to those differing from themselves.

- Service learners and service transformers formed meaningful relationships with those they served and engaged in service immersion trips and ongoing service experiences.
Research Findings (cont..)

Question 2: What did students learn from their service experiences?

- Service doers demonstrated some awareness of differences between themselves and those they served and how service could positively impact someone’s life. They did not learn as much as the other to service types.

- Service learners and service transformers moved beyond awareness to an understanding of social issues and structural inequalities. This understanding in many cases led to changes in viewpoints.
Research Findings (cont..)

**Question 3:** How has involvement in community service influenced life decisions such as changes in major? Choice of career?

- Service doers did not change academic or career plans
- Service learners thought about changing majors, changing careers and some clarified their career goals
- Service transformers changed their majors and/or career goals
Implications and Future Research

- We set out to gain further understanding about service engagement for the purposes of assessment of ways to increase service engagement at the university.

- We would like to better understand what factors would help move service doers to becoming service learners and service transformers.

- In collaboration with the Center for Service and Community Engagement, we plan to conduct a future survey study of the different service profile types.
Questions?